

We claim:

1. A method for reading postal article inscriptions or document inscriptions, comprising the steps of:
 - 5 - recording an image of the postal article or document;
 - automatically reading the image with a single-stage or multistage process OCR devices;
 - if reading results are not complete or unique,
10 reading the images by coding forces in at least one video coding device, the device comprising two or more video coding stations which receive the images via a distribution device, the images being transmitted to the OCR devices and to the video coding devices
15 together with data accompanying the images in order to carry out the step of reading with data relating to reading conditions and additional tasks;
 - supplying images from different customers together with data accompanying the images and relating to
20 postal articles or documents to be read,
 - storing core data relating to each customer such that it can be searched, the data including at least a source of the images, the scope of the agreed reading steps and further services as service types and, in a
25 cost model, their costs as a function of defined image attributes,
 - determining before each reading process, from data accompanying the images and core data, respective customer and respective reading task including image
30 attributes which are required for cost determination,
 - storing customer processing information relating to reading steps together with reading and processing results, determined image attributes, and data accompanying the images, such that they can be searched

and sorted on a time-related basis after carrying out the reading process for each image,

- determining costs incurred from a cost model included in core data by means of the stored data
- 5 relating to the reading processes carried out,
- storing the determined costs such that they can be sorted on the basis of service types of the cost model and on the basis of service time periods, and
- outputting the determined costs as invoices based
- 10 on defined sorting criteria for each customer.

2. The method according to claim 1, further comprising the step of prioritizing the service types which are included in the core data with regard to

15 processing including agreed processing time period for the customers.

3. The method according to claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

- 20 - statistically processing the stored data with results from the service types carried out, the results corresponding to evaluations defined in the core data, and
- outputting the statistically processed data to the
- 25 customers as reports for the defined time periods.

4. The method according to claim 1, wherein tags of the image-producing devices are stated in the data accompanying the images as the source of the images,

30 and are in turn associated with the individual customers.

5. The method according to claim 1, wherein the images and the reading results are associated with the postal articles or documents by means of identification tags.

5

6. The method according to claim 1, wherein the address codes which have been verified by means of address directories are output as reading results of addresses.

10

7. A device for reading postal article inscriptions or document inscriptions by means of image recording devices, OCR devices and, if reading results are not complete or unique, at least one video coding device comprising two or more video coding stations at which the images which have not been successfully OCR-read and are assigned by a distribution device are read and coded by coding forces with the images being transmitted to the OCR devices and to the video coding devices together with data accompanying the images in order to carry out the reading tasks with the data relating to reading conditions and additional tasks, comprising:

15

20

- means for supplying the images from different customers together with data accompanying the images and relating to postal articles or documents to be read,

25

- means for storing core data relating to each customer in a core databank such that it can be searched, the data including at least a source of the images, the scope of the agreed reading and processing steps, and further services as service types and, in a cost model,

30

their costs on agreement as a function of defined image attributes,

- means for providing an evaluation device which determines a respective customer and respective reading

5 task, including image attributes which are required for cost determination before each reading process, from the data accompanying the images and from the core data,

- means for storing in a service databank the customer
10 and processing information relating to the reading and processing steps together with the reading and processing results, the determined image attributes and the data accompanying the images such that they can be searched and sorted on a time-related basis for each
15 image,

- means for determining costs incurred in the evaluation device from the cost model contained in the core data databank by means of the stored data relating to the reading processes carried out,

20 - means for storing the costs such that they can be sorted on a basis of cost model service types and service time periods, and

- means for outputting the costs as invoices based on defined sorting criteria for each customer.

25

8. The device according to claim 7, wherein the evaluation device is designed such that the stored data is processed statistically with the results of the service types carried out and on the basis of
30 evaluations defined in the core data, and is output to a customer as reports for the defined time periods.

9. A method for reading postal article inscriptions or document inscriptions, comprising the steps of:
- recording an image of the postal article or document;
 - 5 - automatically reading the image with a single-stage or multistage process OCR devices;
 - if reading results are not complete or unique, reading the images by coding forces in at least one video coding device, the device comprising two or more
 - 10 video coding stations which receive the images via a distribution device, the images being transmitted to the OCR devices or to the video coding devices together with data accompanying the images in order to carry out the step of reading with data relating to reading
 - 15 conditions and additional tasks;
 - supplying images from different customers together with data accompanying the images and relating to postal articles or documents to be read,
 - storing core data relating to each customer such that
 - 20 it can be searched, the data including at least a source of the images, the scope of the agreed reading steps and further services as service types and, in a cost model, their costs as a function of defined image attributes,
 - 25 - determining before each reading process, from data accompanying the images and core data, respective customer and respective reading task including image attributes which are required for cost determination,
 - storing customer processing information relating to
 - 30 reading steps together with reading and processing results, determined image attributes, and data accompanying the images, such that they can be searched

and sorted on a time-related basis after carrying out the reading process for each image,

- determining costs incurred from a cost model included in core data by means of the stored data
- 5 relating to the reading processes carried out,
- storing the determined costs such that they can be sorted on the basis of service types of the cost model or on the basis of service time periods, and
- outputting the determined costs as invoices based
- 10 on defined sorting criteria for each customer.

10. The method according to claim 9, further comprising the step of prioritizing the service types which are included in the core data with regard to

15 processing including agreed processing time period for the customers.

11. The method according to claim 9, further comprising the steps of:
- 20 - statistically processing the stored data with results from the service types carried out, the results corresponding to evaluations defined in the core data, and
 - outputting the statistically processed data to the
 - 25 customers as reports for the defined time periods.

12. The method according to claim 11, wherein tags of the image-producing devices are stated in the data accompanying the images as the source of the images,

30 and are in turn associated with the individual customers.

13. The method according to claim 11, wherein the images and the reading results are associated with the postal articles or documents by means of identification tags.

5

14. The method according to claim 11, wherein the address codes which have been verified by means of address directories are output as reading results of addresses.

10

15. A device for reading postal article inscriptions or document inscriptions by means of image recording devices, OCR devices and, if reading results are not complete or unique, at least one video coding device comprising two or more video coding stations at which the images which have not been successfully OCR-read and are assigned by a distribution device are read and coded by coding forces with the images being transmitted to the OCR devices or to the video coding devices together with data accompanying the images in order to carry out the reading tasks with the data relating to reading conditions and additional tasks, comprising:

- means for supplying the images from different customers together with data accompanying the images and relating to postal articles or documents to be read,

- means for storing core data relating to each customer in a core databank such that it can be searched, the data including at least a source of the images, the scope of the agreed reading and processing steps, and further services as service types and, in a cost model,

their costs on agreement as a function of defined image attributes,

- means for providing an evaluation device which determines a respective customer and respective reading
5 task, including image attributes which are required for cost determination before each reading process, from the data accompanying the images and from the core data,

- means for storing in a service databank the customer
10 and processing information relating to the reading and processing steps together with the reading and processing results, the determined image attributes and the data accompanying the images such that they can be searched and sorted on a time-related basis for each
15 image,

- means for determining costs incurred in the evaluation device from the cost model contained in the core data databank by means of the stored data relating to the reading processes carried out,

20 - means for storing the costs such that they can be sorted on a basis of cost model service types and service time periods, and

means for outputting the costs as invoices based on defined sorting criteria for each customer.

25

16. The device according to claim 15, wherein the evaluation device is designed such that the stored data is processed statistically with the results of the service types carried out and on the basis of
30 evaluations defined in the core data, and is output to a customer as reports for the defined time periods.